

**Irving H. Hornung  
U.S. Air Force Veteran  
WWII**

**Orchard Park High School  
Interviewed on Thursday, October 26, 2006  
Interviewed by:**

**Catlin Bunker, Joseph Lorenz, Laura Sawyer, Kris Sanjeski**

**Q:** So, how are you today?

**IH:** I'm very good. I'm wearing my 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force hat and my 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force shirt.

**Q:** What's the symbol on your hat mean?

**IH:** It's the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, which was in England during WWII and that's where I was based.

**Q:** For how long?

**IH:** I didn't get over to England until the end of the war. I was there from the end of January 1945 until July 1945, because the war ended.

**Q:** Were you drafted or did you enlist?

**IH:** I enlisted. I enlisted in 1943.

**Q:** What made you want to enlist?

**IH:** It was the thing to do at that time.

**Q:** It was a cool thing, a hip thing?

**IH:** Well, yeah. You know the Japanese attacked us and so forth. And then we went to war with Germany. That seemed to be the proper thing to do. If I didn't enlist, I would be drafted. (You wanted to show off your man skills for the ladies. – laughter). I was seventeen years old. I enlisted in 1943, but they didn't not call me into the service until 1944. Now the reason was that they had a program called, Aviation Cadets. You had to take some tests and then if you past the tests, they would send you to cadet school. You'd go through school and then eventually you'd get a better position, become an officer in the Air Force. At the time in 1944, D-Day was June 6, 1944 where they invaded Europe. At that particular time after that, the war was starting to wind down from that point on. They didn't... All of the schools, they told me, were all filled up. And they were all filled up for months in advance. They didn't expect the war to last that long, but it lasted until May 1944, at least the European war we're talking about. So, I did get in 1944, but I did not get into cadet school because they were phasing that end of it out. They weren't sending anyone at that particular time. So, they said, "You will make a fine gunner." So, what could I say?

**Q:** Why did you want to be in the Air Force?

**IH:** I had a fascination for flying. I would build model airplanes. I had all kinds of model airplanes. It seemed like it would fit in what I would like to do.

**Q:** Where were you living at the time?

**IH:** I was living with my parents in Buffalo.

**Q:** What were the first few days of service like?

**IH:** The first few days, well, I don't recall anything spectacular happening. We just went down to... I ended up in basic training, which was Biloxi, Mississippi. And that was in July or August of 1944 and it was hot. We were there for eight weeks or something like that. Then from there, we were assigned... Well, from there I went to gunnery school. Gunnery school was in Las Vegas, Nevada.

**Q:** Any thing fun there?

**IH:** Las Vegas, Nevada was quite different, from what it is now. There were casinos and that. We didn't get too much time to do that. What they basically did was then we became part of a crew. There was ten on a crew. I was on a B-17 bomber. There were ten on a crew. We started working together.

**Q:** Did you become really close with the nine other guys?

**IH:** Yeah, in time. Well, basic training to gunnery school, we worked together as a crew and flew around the United States until we got familiar. You had new pilots, you had new navigators, new bombers, everybody was new in this crew. They never did these jobs before. So, everybody is learning. In January, we went to England by boat.

**Q:** How long did it take?

**IH:** It took about eight or nine days, I think.

**Q:** You don't get seasick, do you?

**IH:** I never got seasick because I was basically a sailor on that. And being in the water, bouncing up and down, that never bothered me much, but some of them were terribly seasick, terribly seasick. This was an old boat, the Mauretania. The Mauretania in 1945 was probably thirty years old, something like that. Anyway, it got us over there. We landed in Liverpool, England. Then they put us on trains. Then took us to the base at Horam.

**Q:** What was your assignment there? What your assignment at Horam?

**IH:** Well, we were part of a crew, a B17 crew that we had been training with. We were all one crew at that point. Then we were assigned an aircraft. Then we did more training over there to get familiarized with the airfields. At that point, we were in a combat area because you could be bombed there. But at that time in the war, what was happening was that the Germans were busy defending themselves.

**Q:** Did the war have a turning point sort of?

**IH:** Yes. The turning point was earlier in June of 1944 when they invaded over there. The Germans still had a lot of resources and they could do a lot of damage. And we were doing a lot of damage over there also. What is your next question?

**Q:** Did you see combat?

**IH:** Yeah. Yes, I did. I flew... There were fourteen missions.

**Q:** Did you do all fourteen all together or you did like one out of the fourteen?

**IH:** No, I flew fourteen. (That's really cool.

**Q:** All at once?

**IH:** One at a time. One today, one next week (laughter). No, there was fourteen all together.

**Q:** Were there many casualties in your unit?

**IH:** When you say my unit, see I was part of the 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. The 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group was part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. The 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force in England had, I don't know, a couple hundred thousand people over there and they could send up twelve, thirteen hundred bombers at a time. They also had a couple thousand fighters, I believe. So, when you say casualties... How big is Orchard park now? Orchard park, just to give you an idea, Orchard park has twenty-eight thousand and some people that live in Orchard park and in the village. The total 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force casualties from 1942 to 1945 were twenty-six thousand killed. Almost the size of Orchard park was wiped out in three years in England over there. Now most of the casualties were before I got over there. Because the bombers then, they were going out by day which... Well, the U.S. Air Force, they said that we can fly daylight bombing. The British said, "No, you can't." They (U.S.) said yes we can. The U.S. Air Force did it. So, we went out and bombed during the daylight. The British bombed at night. Now daylight bombing took its toll in the form of heavy casualties, especially in 1943 and 1944. Now in some of the raids in 1944, I think, the first ones they had like sixty aircrafts go down in one day and there's ten per aircraft. So, that's six hundred guys that were either killed or missing. Most of them were killed, although there were a lot of them that parachuted and end up in prisoner of war camps.

**Q:** Were you ever a prisoner of war?

**IH:** No. No, I didn't. Fortunately, I didn't get shot down.

**Q:** Could you tell us a couple of your most memorable experiences?

**IH:** The fourteen missions that I had, there was actually five of them that I would say that were memorable. The first mission I went out, I went out to... We went out to a small town in Northern Germany on the North Sea. It was called Swinemünde. And Swinemünde was a small town and they told us that we were going to bomb at the docks and buildings around Swinemünde. Now why we were doing that, nobody could quite figure it out. But anyway, many years later I found out that, Swinemünde, what the Germans were doing there, they were building an atom bomb there. They never told us this. Now why they didn't tell us, I don't know. Maybe, I'm sure they did not want us to know. Maybe the Germans didn't know that they knew and so forth. Anyway, they were building an atom bomb there. Hitler decided to put his money and resources into other places rather than into the atom bomb they were getting close.

**Q:** So, you took them out?

**IH:** Well, we went there and we had good results that day but never thought much about it. Then the second memorable experience, I was on a mission one day, I think it was to Hannover, Germany. The bomb bay doors were open and I had to check on, when they drop the bombs to check to see that all the bombs went out. Well, we had one bomb

hanging on. So, that's not good. The pilot said to put on a little walk around oxygen. Now you have to remember, these airplanes are flying at twenty-eight thousand feet or thirty thousand feet. It's forty degrees below zero. You're traveling two hundred miles an hour and you've got a bomb hanging in there. I went out. These little walk around... We had little walk around bottles of oxygen they called them. And they're only good, I don't know, for ten or fifteen minutes at the most something like that. So, I did go out and fortunately... They were trying to trip the bomb with their switches up in front and I said we'll try to do this together. I gave it a little kick and it went. So, that was one. The next memorable experience was; We were bombing a suburb of Berlin. The suburb was Oranienburg. And the reason why we were bombing Oranienburg was that Oranienburg was a railroad marshalling yard. And what that was, was that they put trains together there and go all over Germany and that was a prime target to disrupt their supplies.

**Q:** So, like slow down their travel?

**IH:** Slow them down (nodding his head) and bomb trains and whatever. But anyway, it was a very large marshalling center, is what they called it. So, we bombed that. At that time in the war, there weren't many, not a lot of German fighter planes, but they had German flak, in other words, anti-aircraft guns, which were very, very heavy. When you got over the targets, it was heavy. So, we got... Our plane got hit. Our starboard engines down between number one and number two engine over there and it knocked out one of the engines, cut it off. And the other engine was running but they'd cut the control cables on it. They made the decision instead of shutting off, we'd be on two engines. That would be quite a ways to go back. Anyway, what we did, is we were running on three engines for quite awhile and then when it started shaking everything a part, then they had to shut that off. But then we were maybe about a half an hour away from the base. They did shut that off and we did come in on two engines. We had to throw stuff out over the English Channel, but we got back.

**Q:** When you were bombing like the small towns and stuff, did a lot of civilians die too or just...?

**IH:** Well, unfortunately, yes. That does happen, because if they are in the areas... I mean, you're bombing on an industrial plant they're going to be working in the industrial plants. (You've got to do what you've got to do.)

**Q:** How did you deal with that in your unit?

**IH:** Well, you think about it but it's not a good thought, you know. You know people are going to get hurt or get killed. We had a job to do, and well, we did it and that was it. Now the other two memorable things are is at the end, close to the end, very near the end of the war in April, the end of April, 1945, the German occupied the Netherlands. The Netherlands, Queen Wilhelmina, she contacted Churchill and Roosevelt and said her people were starving over there. They had no food and the Germans didn't have any food. So, they were in desperate straights. Evidentially what happened was that, Churchill and Roosevelt they decided yes, we can help, we will try to help them, okay. The way to do it was to have planes that carry supplies (deliver food) food over there, but we couldn't do that because all of our own transports were tied up supplying our own troops over there at that time. However, we had a couple thousand bombers over there, but they're not made to drop food. We decided, well let's figure out a way we can

do that and they did. What they did, is that they decided that in the bomb by in these bombers, the doors go down. They were pretty big doors. They decided that they could put food in boxes and whatever, right on the doors. And they found that they could put about a thousand pounds on each door there. So, each bomber carried about a ton of food. Now this... So what happened was, we... The Germans agreed not to fire on us because they were in the Netherlands there. And the war was getting close to being over. They agreed not to do any firing on us while we were on these missions, food missions. Now what happened was that the British, being very proper and that, they called these missions Manna. Manna from the Bible. And typical yanks, we called it Chowhound. So, it became the Manna/Chowhound missions. They ran about seven days or so. For that period of time, we sent over, each day we sent over like six hundred bombers and each one carrying a load of food. They were not parachuted over. We just opened the bomb by doors and they dropped right out.

**Q:** Where did they drop, like in village?

**IH:** Well, they were dropped at some of the airports. And one that I went to, it was a racetrack in the Netherlands near the Hague. And the racetrack, I don't know what it was called, Zuid. The racetrack... We dropped the food inside of the track there. We came over, it was only about three hundred feet off the ground with the bombers there, very low. People were on the rooftops waving and everything. And it was springtime too, so they had tulips. The tulips said thank you Yanks or thank you boys in the tulips. It was an incredible sight. What happened was that we did save them from starvation. Many years later, my wife was looking in the paper and she saw somewhere... and she said, "Did you know that there is a Chowhound association?" I said, "No." She said, "Yeah." She showed me. I didn't know that. I said, "Yeah, I was a member of Chowhounds." I joined the Chowhound association. Then in 1995, what happened was that the Dutch people invited the Manna and Chowhound back to the Netherlands.

**Q:** Did you go?

**IH:** Oh, yes! It was a great trip. I think they treated us better. When we came into the airport in Amsterdam with our passports and that, they said, "We didn't ask for your passports when you came over here before, we're not going to ask you for them now. They met us at the airport and then they took us all the way around and then they wined and dined us. The people were so incredibly thankful and then we found out really that they were losing a thousand a day from starvation around Amsterdam and around Rotterdam. It was a very, very serious thing there. I have a lot of stuff about that.

**Q:** Are you going to show us what you brought?

**IH:** Do you want to see some of it? (Yeah!) Oh, okay. Well, the... I'll tell you the most memorable were those two last missions there, dropping the food to the Dutch there. And then when we came back in 1995, there was an article. It was in the Citizen. They wrote an article and they put it in the Citizen. I've got a copy of it. They wrote it up and a few days later, we got a call from Mary and John Van Risedan from Orchard Park. They said, "Mr. Hornung, do you know, we were in Holland and we'd seen some of that food?" I said, "Oh, no." So, they were there.

**Q:** What were they doing over there in the middle of the war?

**IH:** They lived there. Then they came there. They lived there and then in the fifty's, they came back and settled in the Buffalo area.

**Q:** Who are the photographs of?

**IH:** (Flipping through the book – no answer).

**Q:** Did you keep a journal?

**IH:** Oh, that's what I was looking for. (Looking through photo album).

**Q:** And that's the racetrack where you dropped all the food?

**IH:** Yes. It happens that we were there exactly fifty years to the exact day that this came out.

**Q:** Did they do that on purpose?

**IH:** Yeah, I think they did. Here's a bomber dropping the food out of the bomb by doors there.

**Q:** Is this your unit? Which one are you?

**IH:** I'm on the end over here.

**Q:** Did you keep in touch with any of them after?

**IH:** Some of them. When we started to get into contact, then I found out that some of the guys, they just didn't want to seem to talk about it. You know, after the war guys didn't talk about the war right after the war. Many years later, then they decided that maybe we wanted to talk about it. This is the 95<sup>th</sup> logo.

**Q:** Is that the thing you were in?

**IH:** Yeah. That was the 95<sup>th</sup> bomb unit. Living in Horam, England... We lived in tents in at the base in England. It was a six-man tent. It was cold, you know, it was damp. They had a little coal stove. (To keep warm.) Yeah. It wasn't a vacation.

**Q:** Was the food good? Or did you guys not really have an option?

**IH:** No, the food was good. It was pretty good.

**Q:** Did you guys talk about your girlfriends back home, like they do in the movies?

**IH:** Oh, sure.

**Q:** Did you guys fall in love like with a European girl?

**IH:** It's funny... (Everyone starts looking at the photo album.) They had... I cut this out of a newspaper. They had a newspaper over there called the Star and Stripes and that was made by the army over there and I cut these out.

**Q:** Are these your friends?

**IH:** Yeah. Unfortunately, most of them are dead. (Really?) Yeah. You see, I was the youngster on the crew. Believe it or not. I was the youngster. I don't look like it now (laughter).

**Q:** What grade were you, a senior or out of high school?

**IH:** No, I was finishing up school. I finished high school.

**Q:** What did you do afterwards, career wise?

**IH:** Went to college, Buff. State. I got a B.S. degree. (What?) In industrial arts.

**Q:** Is that what you did?

**IH:** Well, I never really did teach, but I did use that training and went into business for myself as a manufacture's agent. Isn't that something? (Looking at the album).

**Q:** Is that a U.S. plane?

**IH:** Yeah. That's one of our B17 bombers. (Oh, no.) It broke right in half.

**Q:** Did they make it out or no?

**IH:** I don't know.

**Q:** Are you in this picture?

**IH:** Yeah, right there. Remember, when I went over there, I was nineteen years old.

**Q:** What did you guys do for fun? You were all young.

**IH:** It wasn't a lot of fun, but they did have a little bar there that served beer. (Oh!) Yeah, we used to have beer. The people in the Netherlands gave us these patches. People in the Netherlands, can you believe it, made us these ties. They gave us these ties when we were over there. (Looking at the album). That's the tulips, what we saw there. We came in very, very low over the Netherlands. This is my wife and I at in the Netherlands.

**Q:** Did you guys have any reunions?

**IH:** Yeah. We have a 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb group reunion every year and there's an 8th Air Force reunion. And we go to some of those, not all of them. There all over the country. (That's really nice.)

**Q:** When did you meet your wife? Did you meet her before you left or came back?

**IH:** After when I was in college, afterwards.

**Q:** So, you never told us, any love connections across the seas?

**IH:** No. But you know, a lot of guys did end up marrying the English girls. But it was not primarily the flying crews. It was the base crews that were stationed there many years.

**Q:** So, did the girls come back with them or did they stay there?

**IH:** No, they came back with them.

(Continue to look at his things.) Hans Onderwater. I still correspond with him, via email.

**Q:** What was it like the day that the war ended?

**IH:** Oh, everyone was very happy on the base there. We all had a few drinks with that one. We were getting ready and shortly after that we received orders... We were on a B17

Flying Fortress, we were going to go back and retrain for a B29 Super Fortress, which were the ones that dropped the atomic bomb on Japan. We were going to retrain for that, but fortunately that ended. We didn't have to do any of that.

**Q:** What was it like when you came home? When you came back to Buffalo, how did you feel? Did they welcome you?

**IH:** We got a very good welcome. But as I said before, after the war guys didn't talk too much after the war. It wasn't until later. Then I started joining some veterans' organizations like the Veterans of Foreign War and the American Legion. Then you would talk more about it. That was about it. For some reason, they never did talk a lot about it even to the family and that. (It was a rough time.) Yeah.

**Q:** Overall, did the war affect you like in a positive or negative manner? Did you take any experiences with it, like learn from or were you like the other ones where you didn't talk about it? ... Did your experiences from the war change your way of thinking about things?

**IH:** Yeah. Sometimes you do something and you're not sure just how this is going to work out, you know. But you go ahead and do it. This was case on the Chowhound missions we did that. I didn't know... We never knew how serious the situation this was over there until years later we found out that it was very, very serious. So, as I say, sometimes you do something which may affect you later on. It did. We did go back to the Netherlands, this was in 1995. We went back in the year 2000. We went back to the base in 1992, visited at the base and stayed at a lady's house over there. (That was nice.) It was really incredible.

**Q:** What's in the box? Just memorabilia?

**IH:** Well... Remember when I mentioned going to the racetrack over there? (Yeah.) They dropped these for us and they said that these were biscuits that they were in cans that the English had dropped over in cans. It's hard to believe. (Holds up an orange flyer) They drop these from the sky to us.

**Q:** Really. And you got one?

**IH:** Yeah. That's one of them there. (That's really nice.) The people were so grateful. As we were coming out of the racetrack that day, we had our uniform on and so forth. A young guy stopped me and my wife and he says, "Did you drop food here?" I said, "Yeah." And he put his arms around me and said, "You know you saved my grandmother's life." (Aww.) Because they were starving. Do you have any more questions that you want to ask?

**Q:** Do you want to add anything?

**IH:** No, I think I've added enough. We covered pretty good.